

## Northern Command Assists California Firefighting Effort

### Press Release

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U.S. Northern Command is joining the effort to battle 11 wildland fires that have burned more than 230,000 acres in Southern California and has depleted the state's firefighting resources.

While homeland defense is the primary mission of the command established as a result of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, officials noted that U.S. Northern Command also provides "one-stop shopping" for military assistance to civil authorities in the event of disaster relief operations to include wildland fires.

"When called upon, Northern Command's mission is to expeditiously support NIFC (the National Interagency Firefighting Center in Boise, Idaho) in order to lessen or eliminate the effects of wildland fires," said Army Col Jay Marts, USNORTHCOM deputy chief of current operations.

NIFC requested Department of Defense assistance in the form of two Air Force C-130H3 aircraft equipped with the Modular Airborne Firefighting System, or MAFFS. Two aircraft from the 302nd Airlift Wing, Peterson Air Force Base, are deploying to Southern California Oct. 28. They will join two aircraft from the California Air National Guard's 146th Airlift Wing at Channel Island/Point Mugu who flew their first mission Oct. 27.

"We will be ready to fly our first mission 30 minutes after arriving at Point Mugu," noted Air Force Col. Richard Moss, 302nd commander.

The MAFFS-equipped aircraft fly approximately 150 feet above the tree lines and disperse the retardant from the five, 600-gallon tanks near the edge of the fire to constrain the spreading of the flames.

"On average we dispense the retardant in a 90-feet wide by quarter-mile long area per pass," Moss said.

Upon completion of a mission, the crew can have the aircraft ready for its next mission "refueled and refilled with the retardant" in approximately 15 minutes, he explained.

The Department of Defense is a "last resort," and thus is only called in after all local and state assets have been utilized, Marts noted.

"If and when local communities and federal agencies need additional support -- in the form of equipment, expertise, manpower, plans, organization, communications, and training -- the men and women in uniform are prepared and ready to lend a helping hand," he said.

Marts explained that if NIFC determines military firefighting assistance is needed, the center sends a request for assistance to



Members of the 302nd Airlift Wing load the Modular Airborne Firefighting System into a C-130H3 aircraft at Peterson Air Force Base.

Photo credit: Tech. Sgt. Devin Fisher

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the Department of Defense. Once authorized, the tasking is sent to Northern Command to execute.

This marks the second time USNORTHCOM has been called on to provide military assistance to civil authorities in the form of firefighting resources this fire season. The command sent Task Force Steel Dragon soldiers from Fort Hood, Texas, to assist with wildland fires in Montana in early September.